Israel-Palestine Historical Timeline

1897
First Zionist Congress meets in Basel.

1916
The British Commissioner in Egypt promises the Arab leadership post-war independence for former Ottoman Arab provinces.



1917 -The Balfour Declaration
British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour commits Britain to work towards "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people", in a letter to leading Zionist Lord Rothschild.



1929
Over 60 Jews killed and many injured in Hebron Massacre following rumours that Jews were planning on seizing control of the Temple Mount.

1937- The Peel Commission
Lord Peel recommends partitioning British Mandate Palestine into a Jewish state (around a third of the land) and an Arab state (most of the rest of the land, to be united to Transjordan), with Jerusalem and a corridor to the Mediterranean Sea remaining an international zone under British control

1936-37
The Arab Revolt against the British administration begins, at the height of Jewish immigration to Palestine. This immigration was facilitated by the British and occurred in various waves from 1917 onwards.

1920
Palestine becomes British Mandate after Ottomans defeated in WWI.



1941-45 - The Holocaust
The Nazi regime led by Hitler persecuted and killed millions of Jews and some other minorities. Millions of Jews were sent to concentration camps and 6 million of them were murdered in the Holocaust. This led to widespread calls for the establishment of a Jewish state.

1946
The King David Hotel in Jerusalem - headquarters for the British administration of Mandatory Palestine - is bombed by the Jewish militant right-wing group Irgun, killing 91 people and injuring 46.

1947
Britain hands responsibility for resolving the conflict over to the UN. The UN recommends a partition of the land in a state of Israel and a state of Palestine, which is accepted by Israeli leaders and rejected by Arab leaders, who felt that the percentage of land was disproportionate, and that previous promises made to them had been broken. Civil war breaks out in the land.

April 1948 - Deir Yassin Massacre
The massacre of around 100 Palestinians by some members of Jewish paramilitary groups leads to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing to Lebanon, Egypt and the area which is now the West Bank. As well as this massacre, hundreds of other Arab villages were also destroyed.

15th May 1948
Neighbouring Arab countries declare war on the new state of Israel and the civil war turns into a war between Israel and its neighbours.

14th May 1948
David Ben-Gurion proclaims the establishment of the new State of Israel.



The Nakba/War of Independence 1948
The war results in the mass displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians by Jewish militants, and in many fleeing their homes, and creates a refugee crisis. 'Nakba' means 'Catastrophe' in Arabic.
In Israel it is known as the War of Independence and results in Israel controlling 78% of the land, with Egypt controlling Gaza and Jordan controlling the West Bank.

1948
'In the decades following the war of 1948 approximately 850,000 Jews from neighbouring Arab countries were forced to leave their homes and migrated to Israel'

1956
Suez Crisis
Israel, the UK and France unsuccessfully invade Egypt to try to regain control of the Suez Canal. Thousands of Jews ordered to leave Egypt in the aftermath.

1964
The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is established. Yasser Arafat becomes its chairman five years later.

1967
The Six Day War begins on 5 June when Arab armies amass on Israel's border. Israel launches a pre-emptive air strike and defeats the armies of Syria, Jordan and Egypt. Israel gains the West Bank (from Jordan), Gaza and the Sinai (from Egypt) and the Golan Heights (from Syria). Israel also annexes East Jerusalem, previously under the control of Jordan. The term 'occupation' that we hear today refers to these lands that Israel occupied in 1967. The Al Aqsa compound remains under the Jordanian Waqf.

1970

The PLO is headquartered in Jordan where it continues to grow. Tensions increase between the PLO and Jordanian leadership, resulting in an armed conflict known as Black September. The PLO is expelled from Jordan and regroups in Lebanon. The People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a faction within the PLO, hijacks passenger planes in order to draw international attention to Palestine.

1972

11 members of the Israeli team killed by the Black September group - a Palestinian militant organisation - at the Munich Olympics.

1973

The Yom Kippur War catches Israel off-guard following a surprise attack from Egypt and Syria. The war lasts for nearly three weeks, and ends following international pressure for a ceasefire.

1974

Yasser Arafat makes a speech at the UN. It becomes a watershed moment for the Palestinian struggle for international recognition. A year later, a US State Department Official would state that "the legitimate interests of the Palestinian Arabs must be taken into account in the negotiating of an Arab-Israeli peace".

1978

Egypt and Israel sign the Camp David peace accords in September 1978 outlining "the framework for peace in the Middle East" which includes limited autonomy for Palestinians. It also leads to the eventual return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.

1982

Lebanon war breaks out following fighting between the IDF and the PLO, which was based at the time in Southern Lebanon. Israel eventually withdraws slowly and in multiple stages, partly caused by global and national anger at the massacre at Sabra and Shatila refugee camp. This was a Phalange or Lebanese militia massacre of Palestinians, which Israel's Kahan Commission later found the IDF to be indirectly responsible for.

1987-1993 The First Intifada

A mass uprising - or intifada - against the Israeli occupation begins in Gaza and quickly spreads to the West Bank. Protests & actions mainly take the form of civil disobedience, throwing stones and molotov cocktails, general strikes, boycotts on Israeli products, graffiti, and barricades. The uprising gets widespread international attention. The Israeli Defence Forces respond with plastic bullets and sometimes live ammunition, which is criticised as disproportionate. During the six years, 1551 Palestinians, 271 Israeli citizens, and 150 Israeli security forces were killed.

1988

The Palestinian National Council (a government-in-exile) convenes in Algeria in November and votes to accept a "two-state" solution based on the 1947 UN partition, to renounce terrorism and to seek a negotiated settlement calling for Israel to withdraw from territory captured in the 1967 war.



1993 - The Oslo Accords

The election of the left-wing Labour government in June 1992, led by Yitzhak Rabin, triggers a period of Israeli-Arab peacemaking in the mid-1990s. Israel finally agrees to allow PLO participants in peace talks, culminating in the Declaration of Principles, signed on the White House lawn and sealed with a historic first handshake between Rabin and Arafat watched by 400 million people around the world.

1994

On May 4, Israel and the PLO reach an agreement in Cairo to implement Israel's military withdrawal from most of the Gaza Strip, excluding Jewish settlements and the land around them and from the Palestinian town of Jericho in the West Bank. On 1 July, jubilant crowds line the streets of Gaza to cheer Yasser Arafat's return to Palestine after 27 years in exile. The Palestinian National Authority (PA) in the autonomous areas is formed.

1994

Israel and Jordan sign peace treaty ending state of war between them

1995

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated by a Jewish religious extremist on November 4th, sending shockwaves around the world.



1995-2003

Several rounds of peace negotiations take place during these years but fail to bring about a lasting resolution:

- 1995 Oslo II negotiations, building on the Oslo Accords
- 2000: Bill Clinton invites Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak to a summit at Camp David
- 2002: Arab Peace Initiative is proposed by the Saudi Crown Prince
- 2003: Geneva Initiative led by former Palestinian and Israeli officials
- 2003: The US, Russia, EU and UN create a roadmap to peace

1996

Benjamin Netanyahu wins the election on 29 May, campaigning against the Oslo peace deals. Tensions increase under Netanyahu's settlement and religious sites policies.



2000-05 - The Second Intifada

Ariel Sharon with an Israeli political delegation tours the Temple Mount, a provocative act to Palestinians, spurring demonstrations. The demonstrations marked a start to the violent Second Intifada lasting five years. During this time, 1010 Israelis and over 3000 Palestinians were killed. The Palestinians militant groups engaged in numerous suicide bombings, rock throwing and gunfire, while the Israelis responded with gunfire, tank and air attacks, and numerous targeted killings.

2002

Palestinian militants step up their suicide attacks against Israeli citizens in 2002 as the death toll increases at an alarming rate. Israel responds with Operation Defensive Shield, building a "security barrier" along the West Bank that Palestinians see as an attempt to annex more land.

2005

Following years of violence in Gaza, including rockets fired into civilian communities in southern Israel, Israel withdraws from Gaza, removing 21 settlements and 10,000 Israelis, but continues to control the airspace and coastline, tightening control over the movement of people and goods across the border over the following year. Egypt controls the Gaza-Egypt border.

2004-05

Yasser Arafat is taken ill and flown to France in late October 2004.
He dies of a mysterious blood disorder on 11 November.
Mahmoud Abbas is elected president of the PA in January 2005.

2007

After Hamas takes over Gaza following a civil war with Fatah, Israel and Egypt implement a full blockade of Gaza, controlling the crossing of people and goods across its borders.

2006

Hamas* wins a landslide majority in the Palestinian elections and ousts Fatah from Gaza.

2008-09

Following the breakdown of a fragile ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, Israel launches 'Operation Cast Lead' in a full-scale invasion of Gaza while Hamas launches rockets into Israel. This results in 1,166–1,417 Palestinian and 13 Israeli deaths. In January 2009 Israel and Hamas agree to a unilateral ceasefire ending months of war.

2018-2019

Great March of Return: A series of weekly, largely non-violent, demonstrations by Palestinians that take place near the Gaza-Israel border for nearly 2 years, demanding the right of return for Palestinians to lands they were expelled from in 1948. Hundreds of Palestinians are killed and thousands injured following the use of deadly force by the Israeli military in response to the protests

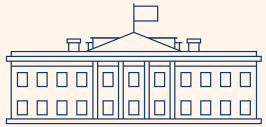
2014

Hamas and the PA form a reconciliation agreement as tensions rise on both sides leading to more violence. During seven weeks of fighting, approximately 2,100 Palestinians were killed (approx. 1617 civilians and 693 Hamas militants), with more than 11,000 wounded and 100,000 left homeless. On Israel's side, 64 soldiers and six civilians were killed while 469 soldiers and 256 civilians were injured.

2010

Obama, Abbas and Netanyahu gather to restart negotiations and direct them towards a two-state solution, with a Jewish state of Israel and the creation of a state for the Palestinian people.





2012

Clashes between Hamas and Israel erupted with the deadliest violence since the 2008 Gaza invasion. Israel and Hamas exchange rocket fire killing and wounding dozens of Israelis and Palestinians.

2010 onwards

Israeli settlement policy sees expansion and development of settlements in the West Bank. Settlements are illegal under international law and include the E1 settlement, which would see East Jerusalem cut off from the West Bank.

October 2023-Present

On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking hundreds hostage. Israel responded with a military operation in Gaza, resulting in the killing of over 70,000 Palestinian people by summer 2026. The ICC has issued arrest warrants for leaders of both Hamas and Israel for alleged war crimes. The ICJ is reviewing South Africa's allegation that Israel is committing genocide; it has found a plausible risk of genocide and ordered Israel to avoid genocidal acts. In September 2025, a UN inquiry reported that Israeli forces had committed four of the five acts constituting genocide under the Geneva Convention. This paper was written on its own initiative and does not have formal status within the UN. In June 2026 a UN independent commission found that Israel was committing genocide by deliberately targeting children. Israel denies the accusations in both of these reports. The reports were not a legal ruling and the ICJ and ICC have yet to reach a verdict.

2017

Donald Trump announces that the US government would recognize Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel. This was followed by the move of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem soon after.

2020
The 'Deal of the Century'

After ongoing delays to the Trump administration's long awaited 'deal of the century', in January it is finally released. The plan suggests a two-state solution with Israel annexing the Jordan Valley and a complex proposal of land swaps between Israeli settlements in the West Bank and land in the Negev desert. The plan is rejected by the PA who cite that it is biased in nature.



June 2021

The Ra'am party becomes the first Arab party in over 50 years to form part of an Israeli government coalition, with Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett. The coalition falls in 2022 and is succeeded by the current Netanyahu-led coalition.

2020

Abraham Accords: agreements normalising relations signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and between Israel and Bahrain, among others.



May 2021

11 days of intense violence erupts, triggered by the decision of the Israeli Supreme Court to evict 6 families from the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Over 200 Palestinians and 13 Israelis are killed, including children on both sides.

Last Updated: September 2026

*Students should be aware that Hamas is now a UK-proscribed terrorist group